



# The Gospel of John

“The Word Became Flesh”

Introduction & John 1:1–5

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## Introduction

John’s gospel presents an account of Jesus’ life and ministry that is easy enough for a child to understand. And yet it also reveals some of the most profound Christian truths — things that even the most brilliant of minds struggle to comprehend. How could the infinite, eternal God become a man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ? This is the truth which John seeks to reveal to us in this gospel.

## **Who Wrote this Gospel?**

As we might assume from the title, this account was written by the apostle John. Although he never mentions himself by name, we can deduce that John is the author from various clues in the text. First of all, the writer calls himself “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (21:20). We also note that he was present at the Last Supper (13:23). Since only the twelve were present at that meal, the beloved disciple would have had to been an apostle. We also know he was one of seven disciples mentioned in 21:2. Peter is ruled out because they address each other (13:24; 21:7). Furthermore, his closeness to Jesus at the Last Supper reveals that he was part of an inner circle within the twelve (13:23). This leaves Peter (ruled out already), James, and John. James was martyred too early to have written this gospel (Acts 12:2). By process of elimination, the beloved disciple and author of John (21:24) can be none other than the apostle John.

## **When was this Gospel Written?**

This gospel was likely written sometime between A.D. 80–90. John indicates some knowledge of how Peter was martyred (21:19), an event which took place in A.D. 68. We also know that a general knowledge of the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, & Luke) is assumed on the part of John’s readers. There are several events which John assumes his readers are aware of, and yet we can only find the account of these events in the Synoptics (e.g. the

imprisonment of John the Baptist — John 3:24; cf. Matt 4:12; 14:3; Mark 6:17; Luke 3:20). This is in keeping with the fact that the Synoptic gospels were written in the early to mid-60s prior to the destruction of the temple in a.d. 70. There would have been ample time for those accounts to circulate by the time John’s gospel was written. John likely wrote this account prior to penning his epistles while he was overseeing the church in Ephesus.

### **What was John’s Purpose in Writing this Gospel?**

John is the only gospel writer to give us an explicit purpose statement. In 20:31, he states that he has written these things “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” The second part of the statement indicates that his purpose was evangelistic. This gospel was written so that people might have eternal life through belief in Jesus Christ. John focuses on the term “believe” throughout his gospel using it nearly one hundred times. But the first part of this verse also reveals an apologetic purpose. John wanted to convince his readers of Jesus’ true identity. He is God incarnate, the Messiah, and the Savior of the world. This is the reason for the inclusion of eight particular miracles, culminating in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In the end, salvation comes only through believing in Him.

### **What is the Theme of the Gospel of John?**

In John 1:14, we read that “the Word became flesh.” This theme unfolds throughout John’s gospel as he explains why it is that God Himself would take on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ mission was to redeem fallen humanity — as many as would believe on Him for eternal life (3:16).

### **The Incarnation of the Son of God (1:1–18)**

Jesus Christ did not always have a physical human body like He does today. But neither did His existence begin in the town of Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. Prior to that Jesus existed as the Son of God, whom John identifies here as the Word. These first 18 verses reveal not only that the divine Word took on human flesh, but that His message has now been declared throughout the world and has eternal ramifications for all of mankind. Each of us must acknowledge the reality of the divine Son of God and believe in Him if we are to have the hope of salvation. As such, these opening verses serve as an overview of the entire book.

## The Preexistence of the Word (vv. 1–2)

There is a sense in which John's gospel could be considered the first book of the Bible, both theologically and chronologically speaking. The book of Genesis begins with God's act of creation. But in John we see God's activity (vv. 1–2) prior to that first creative act (v. 3). The name used for Jesus here is "the Word," which is taken from the Greek term *logos* (λόγος). John chose this term because it specifically identifies Jesus' divine nature before He became a human being, whereas the names "Jesus" and "Christ" are usually more connected with His humanity.

*Logos* itself is a term loaded with meaning. To Greek philosophers, the term *logos* was an abstract impersonal principle of reason and order in the universe. It was a creative force, but also the source of wisdom. But contrary to Greek philosophy, Jesus was not an impersonal force or principle. In Him the true *logos* who was God became a man. This concept was completely foreign to Greek thought. This term would also have had great significance for the Jews. In the Jewish Targums (Aramaic translations of the Old Testament), you would frequently find the term *memra* (מִמְרָא) or "Word" in place of the name of God. The word of the Lord was also an expression of divine power and wisdom. John presented Jesus to his Jewish readers as the incarnation of divine power and revelation.

But notice where John begins this discussion: "in the beginning." As mentioned previously, this does not refer to God's first creative act (cf. v. 3), but rather to the Word's existence in eternity past. It is significant that John uses the Greek word *eimi* (εἶμι), translated "was." It occurs in the imperfect tense which indicates an ongoing action in the past. The Word was in a constant state of existing prior to the creation of the world. This affirms the orthodox Christian teaching that the Word is eternal. He did not come into being at some point prior to creation. He always was! Had John used the term *ginomai* (γίνομαι), it would have implied that the Word came into existence at the beginning along with the rest of creation. But *eimi* stresses that He always existed.

Then John takes this a step further by declaring that the Word was with God. It is difficult for the English to bring out the full richness of this phrase. The Greek really gives the picture of two intelligent beings facing one another and engaging in intelligent discourse. From all

eternity past, Jesus — the second person of the trinity — existed having intimate fellowship with God the Father (1 John 1:2). Yet in an act of condescension, Jesus left the glory of heaven and humbly took on human flesh (Phil 2:7–8). This is one of the most marvelous facets of this gospel, when we consider what Jesus gave up to make salvation possible for you and me!

The pinnacle of verse 1 comes in the third phrase. Not only did the Word exist from all eternity past and have intimate fellowship with God the Father, but the Word *was* God! These four words in both Greek and English form one of the clearest statements of the deity of Christ that can be found in Scripture. But despite this clarity, several heresies have sprung up from early on in the church. Notice how the phrase appears in the Greek:

	<u>P.N.</u>	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Article</u>	<u>Subject</u>
Greek	θεός	ἦν	ὁ	λόγος
Transliterated	theos	ēn	ho	logos
English	God	was	the	Word

#### Error #1: The Word is Not Fully Divine

The first thing we need to note is that “**God**” is anarthrous (i.e. not preceded by the article “the”). Some will argue that it is an indefinite noun and mistranslate it as “the Word was *divine*” — (i.e. possessing only *some* of the qualities of God).

#### Error #2: The Word is One of Many gods

Others like the Jehovah’s Witnesses will go even further by translating it “the Word was *a god*” (i.e. one of many gods). But the absence of the article before *theos* does not make it indefinite.

*Logos* has the **article** to show that it is the **subject** of the sentence, since it is in the same case as *theos*. Thus the rendering “God was the Word is not valid because “the Word,” not “God” is the subject. This would also be theologically incorrect because it would equate the Father (from the preceding clause) with the Word, thus denying that they are two separate persons. The predicate nominative “God” describes the nature of the Word, showing that He is of the same essence as the Father.

According the rules of Greek Grammar, when a **predicate nominative** precedes the **verb**, it cannot be considered indefinite (and thus

translated “a god” instead of “God.”)<sup>1</sup> The term *theos* refers to the true and living God for several reasons.

- 1) *Theos* appears without the definite article four other times in the immediate context (vv. 6, 12, 13, 18; cf. 3:2, 21; 9:16; Matt 5:9). Not even the Jehovah’s Witnesses skewed translation of the Bible renders the anarthrous *theos* “a god” in those verses.
- 2) If John meant to say that the Word was *divine* or *a god*, there are ways he could have phrased it to make it unmistakably clear. For example, if he only meant to say that the Word was in some sense divine, he could have used the term *theios* (cf. 2 Pet 1:4):

A)	θειός	ἦν	ὁ	λόγος
	theios	ēn	ho	logos
	divine	was	the	Word

Or he could have put another article in front of *theos*, making the two nouns (*theos* and *logos*) interchangeable. However, this would mean the Father was the Word and would in effect deny the trinity.

B)	ὁ	θεός	ἦν	ὁ	λόγος
	ho	theos	ēn	ho	logos
	the	God	was	the	Word

John chose the precise words he did, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order to convey the true nature of the Word Jesus Christ. The facts of Jesus’ deity and equality with the Father are an essential part of the Christian faith. John warns us in his second epistle that if someone comes to us and does not bring these teachings about Christ, then we are not receive them into our homes or even give them a greeting (2 John 10). We should not be aiding false teachers in any way by giving them food or lodging. If we do, then we are effectively participating in their evil deeds (2 John 11).

### The Creative Power of the Word (v. 3)

John now moves onto another astounding truth: the Word created everything that came into being. This statement again gives us two additional proofs of His deity.

- 1) We must acknowledge that the Creator of all things is Himself uncreated, and the Scriptures are clear that only the eternal God is

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<sup>1</sup> This is known as a Colwell Construction. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996); p. 266–70.

uncreated. We already noted in verse 2 that John used the Greek verb *eimi* — a verb denoting the ongoing existence of the Word in the past. In this verse John uses a form of the verb *ginomai* when referring to the universe, denoting something that came into being.

- 2) The fact that Jesus is the Creator also verifies His deity, because God is often portrayed in Scripture as the Creator (Gen 1:1; Psalm 102:5; Isa 40:28; Rom 1:25; Eph 3:9; Rev 4:11).

### Error #3: Spiritual Things are Good, but Physical Things are Bad

By stressing the role of the Word in Creation, John countered a false teaching that would later develop into a heresy known as Gnosticism. The Gnostics emphasized a dualistic philosophy that was popularized by Plato, who said that the spirit was good, but all physical matter is evil. They believed that the good God could not have created the physical universe. Instead, one of God's offspring several generations removed was evil and foolish enough to create the physical universe. The Scriptures clearly reject that idea, affirming that Jesus Christ was the Father's agent in creating everything.

At this point we may pause and ask ourselves, "Is the world really good?" The answer is "yes" (Gen 1:31)! God created all matter as good, but many things have been distorted since the Fall in Genesis 3. Since that time creation itself has groaned and been subject to futility and corruption (Rom 8:19–21). It awaits the day when Christ will return to the earth, lifting the curse, and restoring it back to an Edenic-like state (cf. Isa 11:6–9).

### **The Self-Existence of the Word (vv. 4–5)**

In these next two verses, John briefly summarizes the incarnation. Jesus, the embodiment of life and the Light of heaven, entered the sin-darkened world of men and the world reacted in various ways to Him.

The two terms "life" and "light" are common in John's gospel. The term used in verse 4 for life is *zoē* (ζωή). It refers to spiritual life as opposed to *bios* (βίος) which describes physical life (cf. 1 John 2:16). In this sense, it refers to Jesus having life in Himself. This is known as the theological concept of aseity, or self-existence. It is yet another evidence of Christ's deity, since only God is self-existent. Everything in the universe came into being a certain point, but not so with Christ. Since He is self-existent, He is the source and author of all other life —

both physical and spiritual. In John's gospel, whenever you see the term "life" appear, it is always translating *zoē* and referring to either spiritual or eternal life. These kinds of life can only be imparted by God according to His sovereign grace.

Closely connected with the idea of life is term "Light." The ideas are very similar in that light is the manifestation of the divine life. Just as the Word and God are not inseparable, but share similar properties; so it is with life and light. God's life is holy and true. Light is that truth and holiness manifest against the darkness of lies and sin.

On an intellectual level, light refers to truth (Psalm 119:105; Prov 6:23; 2 Cor 4:4) and darkness to falsehood (Rom 2:19). Morally, light refers to holiness (Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 6:14; Eph 5:8; 1 Thess 5:5), and darkness to sin (Prov 4:19; Isa 5:20; Acts 26:18). In fact, Satan's domain is often described as the domain of darkness (Col 1:13; Eph 6:12), whereas Jesus is the Light that shines into the darkness of the lost world (John 8:12; 9:5). But despite Satan's ongoing attacks against the Light, the darkness did not "comprehend" it. This term is better translated as "overcome." The point is not that the darkness has failed to comprehend the truth about Jesus. On the contrary, they understand Him all too well. Every time Jesus had a run-in with a demon during His ministry, they always knew who He was and declared theologically orthodox statements about Him (if they were even allowed to speak). The demons know the truth and believe it (James 2:19). The point here is that they do not have the ability to overpower the Light. Satan and his forces had been trying in vain for centuries to kill the life and extinguish the Light. Satan repeatedly tried to destroy the nation of Israel and the Davidic line of kings through whom the Messiah would come. He also made a futile attempt to kill the infant Jesus, by using his puppet Herod to murder all the babies in Bethlehem (Matt 2:16). But all these attempts inevitably ended in failure. Even Satan's seeming triumph at the cross, ultimately sealed his doom (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; cf. 1 John 3:8).

## **Conclusion**

For unbelieving mankind, a similar doom awaits. This is not because they don't know the truth. Romans 1:18–21 declares that all of humanity recognizes the truth of God's existence in the majesty of His creation. But they have rejected that truth because their hearts were darkened. All those who reject Christ will be forever lost. Don't wait! Believe in Christ today and He will save you from your sins. Only the

eternal Word — Jesus Christ — has the power to grant you spiritual and eternal life. You have seen that Light today by being exposed to God's holy Word. How will you respond?

~AWB